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Housekeepers' Chat

Wednesday, February 12, 1930.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: "How Much Sleep for the Baby?" Information from Children's Bureau, U. S. Dept. of Labor. Menu from Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Publication available: "Infant Care."

--ooOoo--

How much sleep does a very young baby need? From 21 to 22 hours out of the 24. During the second and third months, he can get along with about 20 hours. When he is six months old, he should sleep about 16 to 18 hours -- 12 hours at night, with only one interruption for a feeding, and two or three hours in the afternoon.

How long should his afternoon naps be? Not too long, or they will interfere with his night sleep. At six months of age, the afternoon nap may last till 3 or 3:30; at one year of age, not longer than 2:30, or 3, lest it keep the baby from sleeping at night. During cold or cool weather, it is important that the baby take a nap out of doors, in the sun, protected from the wind. In cold weather, if the sun is not shining, naps should be taken indoors.

Is it all right for a baby to be put to sleep in his ordinary daytime clothes? No. At bedtime and at naptime, take off his dress, petticoat, shirt, shoes, and stockings, and put on his nightgown. Before he goes to bed at night sponge him off with a wash cloth wrung out of lukewarm water. He will sleep better, both day and night, if he is comfortable.

Teach the baby to sleep through the ordinary household noises. It should not be necessary to walk on tiptoe, and talk in whispers while he sleeps, but he should have a reasonably quiet place for his daytime naps, as well as for his long night sleep.

I don't suppose it's necessary to say to modern mothers, "Never give the baby any sort of medicine to make him sleep." All soothing sirups, and so forth, contain drugs that are bad for the baby, and many of them are exceedingly dangerous. Of course we all know better than to allow the baby to go to sleep with anything in his mouth. He should not be allowed to suck a pacifier, nor his fingers, nor even his bottle.

What about the common practice of taking the baby to the picture show? In many families, if the father and mother both go out there is no one to stay with the baby, but the child's welfare should be considered first. If baby goes to the show, his habit of going to bed immediately after the 6 o'clock feeding is broken, he loses some part of the long unbroken sleep that he needs, and he is over-stimulated by lights and noise. Furthermore, he is likely to be kept for an hour or more in a close, hot atmosphere, and may be exposed to some contagious disease. Babies should not be taken into crowds of any sort.



Do you have a problem in cold weather, to keep the baby warm, and at the same time give him enough fresh air? When the weather is moderately cold, several light wool blankets will be needed! But if the temperature in the room falls below 15 degrees, the baby needs a shirt and stockings as well as a warm nightgown; and perhaps a soft, roomy sweater over his nightgown.

Cover his hands, either with the sleeves of the sweater or nightgown, or with mittens. A sleeping bag made of an all-wool blanket will help to keep him warm.

After the baby is 5 or 6 months old, or whenever he can not be depended upon to stay under his blankets all night, he should have a sleeping bag. For the winter, the bag may be made of any woolen material, preferably a soft blanket (an old one will do). For ordinary summer nights, a bag made of muslin or outing flannel may be used.

Do you know how to make a sleeping bag? The simplest and best plan is to cut a slit in the middle of the blanket, wide enough to permit it to slip easily over the baby's head. Bind or stitch the cut edges. Slip the blanket over the baby's head, smooth it down, under and over him, and fold the lower corners toward the middle, and fasten with safety pins. This makes it possible to change the baby's diaper, without taking him out of the blanket.

Don't use a sleeping bag in the hottest weather, because it prevents the air from circulating around the child.

I have a letter here, from a young mother who says that her baby does not sleep well at night -- he awakens often and seems uncomfortable. Are you sure that he has not been over-excited, from having been played with too vigorously, in the latter part of the day? Babies should observe "quiet hours" from 4 o'clock on. Of course, over-stimulation is to be avoided at all times, no matter what the age of the baby. If the baby is restless he may be too warm, or too cold; there may be something scratching him, or there may be wrinkles in the bed clothing; he may be lying in a cramped position; maybe his clothes are too tight; perhaps he ate too much. It may be, also, that the room is too light, too noisy, or not sufficiently aired.

What do we grown-ups require, to make us sleep well? Plenty of fresh air, passing in a constant current through the room, no light shining in our eyes, quiet, a clean body, clean, comfortable clothing, a good bed, and suitable covering. Baby needs the same conditions.

Don't be over-anxious about him. Feed him properly, see that he is comfortable, arrange the windows, and then leave him to his sleep. Don't go back every time he cries -- don't go back even once, unless you think there's some important reason for his crying.

Another question today comes from a mother who wants a copy of the "Baby's Daily Time Card." This card gives definite schedules for the baby's daily program -- feeding and habit training. The new revised edition of "Infant Care" includes the "Baby's Daily Time Card." I wish that every mother would send for this publication. I have exhausted my vocabulary of adjectives, talking about it -- "to see it is to be convinced."

It's getting close to menu-time -- we had better conclude this lecture on "Sleep for Children," and give the poor dears something to eat.





What shall we have for dinner today? Something that little Johnny will eat with relish, for we aren't the kind of folks who nag children to "clean up their plates." No sir! Given the right kind of a meal, Johnny will require no urging. Let's begin with Hot Tomato Bouillon. Does that sound good to you? Make it of canned tomatoes, cooked with a little seasoning, strained, and then heated again. Let Johnny drink his Tomato Bouillon from a cup.

Next? How about some Crisp Bacon, and some Scalloped Vegetables, And of course a green vegetable. Children who attend the nursery school in my city are particularly fond of Scalloped Vegetables. Almost any mixture of left-over vegetables can be used in this way. For instance, peas, carrots, onions, and any leafy vegetable; or string beans, corn, celery, and cabbage. The vegetables, cooked or canned, should be mixed with cream sauce, poured into a shallow baking dish, covered with buttered crumbs, and baked until the sauce bubbles up, and the crumbs are brown. So much for the Scalloped Vegetables.

We mustn't forget our green vegetable -- Let's serve Lettuce Leaves. They have also found at the Nursery School that small children cannot manage shredded lettuce and cabbage, but they love to take a leaf in their fingers, and eat it as we would celery. Such manners, you say? Reminds you of Peter Rabbit? Oh dear no!--eating a leaf of lettuce from one's fingers is perfectly good nursery school manners--and, more important, it's sound dietetics. So much for the Leaf of Lettuce.

Now we need a dessert. Let's have Bananas and Cream, and -- What else appeals to children? Some nice cookies, cut with the heart-shaped cookie cutters. So much for the Bananas and Cream and the Cookies, and now we have a menu: Hot Tomato Bouillon; Crisp Bacon; Scalloped Vegetables; Lettuce Leaves; Bananas and Cream; and Valentine Cookies.

Thursday: "Odds and Ends of Information."

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